

FRENCH REVOLUTION AS A WORLD FORCE 307

The ringing blows of Thor's hammer awoke the nation from its slumbers. Political unification was deferred for a couple of generations, but the signal for deliverance from the thralldom of outworn institutions and ideas was sounded by the tocsin of 1789.

The wars unleashed by the Revolution swept away many familiar landmarks, among them the Holy Roman Empire, and profoundly modified the thought and sentiment of Europe. The challenge to tradition, bringing blood-stained anarchy in its train, led to a temporary revival of the Roman Church. During the course of the Revolution Joseph de Maistre foretold that, though directed against Catholicism and in favour of democracy, its results would be exactly the contrary; and the next generation was to prove the partial accuracy of the forecast. The Papacy won back part of its power by suffering, and the violence of the attack on religion in France and in the countries she overran strengthened the reaction. The conclusion of the Concordat in 1802 merely recognized the change that had already occurred. The principle of authority seemed to regain its place. The aesthetic appeal was made in Chateaubriand's *Genie du Christianisme*, and the appeal to logic received its classic expression a few years later in de Maistre's treatise *Du Pape*. Yet the revival of religious practice was to prove only a passing phenomenon, for in its ultimate effect the French Revolution acted as a powerful solvent not only of ecclesiastical authority but of dogmatic belief. The growing secularization of thought, which was the main characteristic of the Age of Enlightenment, was accelerated by the movement which scoffed at tradition and proclaimed the supremacy of reason.

The most important long-range result of the Revolution

has been the extension and application of the principle of equality. The conception of common citizenship made it difficult to maintain the disabilities of the Jews. Their case had been persuasively argued by Lessing and other philosophers before 1789 ; but it is to the Revolution, to Mirabeau and Grégoire, to the march of the French armies across Europe, that the Jews look back as the signal of their emancipation. It was equally difficult to tolerate the continuance of slavery. While the English abolitionists, mainly Quakers and Evangelicals, were largely animated by religious scruples, the Frenchmen who founded the Société des Amis des Noirs approached the problem from the standpoint of human rights.